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ABSTRACT

To obtain more information about the characteristics, work patterns, and career paths of women in middle management roles, this study collected structured interview data from 45 managerial women in business and education. During summer 1987, each student in the Women and Careers class at Texas Woman's University interviewed two female managers, one in business and the other in education. Interviews consisted of 25 open-ended questions focusing on career goals, career and life planning, factors motivating movement into management, leadership styles and philosophy, employee motivation techniques, effect of career on marital status, sexual harassment, office politics, dressing for success, childhood heroes, involvement in team sports, and advice to share with beginning female managers. Results showed that the managerial women (1) had been in management positions for 5 to 10 years, have college degrees, are married, and are the eldest children in their families; (2) did not establish life or career goals until later in life; (3) would like to have attended college earlier, taken business and finance courses, and regarded their education more seriously; (4) have promoted teamwork and commitment through motivation techniques, goal orientation, fairness, delegation, and participative decisionmaking; (5) had fathers or mentors who greatly influenced their leadership styles; (6) moved into management to obtain higher salaries, be change agents, and meet new challenges; (7) motivate employees by using praise, consensus, and advancement; (8) were assertive, but not necessarily risk-takers; (9) said they advanced as a result of experience, a good education, high visibility, teamwork, and goal-setting. (MLH)

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CAREER PATHS AND WORK PATTERNS OF WOMEN IN MID-MANAGEMENT ROLES IN BUSINESS AND EDUCATION

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More and more of today's American women are in the nation's work force, and many of these working women now have "careers" rather than "jobs." As the ranks of these managerial women increase, so does the interest in their career histories and present employment circumstances. In addressing the need for more information about the characteristics, work patterns, and career paths of women in mid-management roles, this study was designed to collect interview data from forty-five managerial women in business and education concerning these issues.

The research technique used for this study involved the use of structured interviews that were conducted by members of the Women and Careers class at Texas Woman's University during the summer of 1987. Each student in the class interviewed two female managers, one in business and the other in education.

The interview consisted of twenty-five open-ended questions that focused on the following: career goals and career and life planning, factors that provided the motivation to move into management, leadership style, motivational techniques used with employees, philosophy of leadership/management, impact of career on marital status, assertiveness, risk-taking behaviors, personnel problems, differences in leadership effectiveness of men and women, differences in managing male and female employees, sexual harrassment in the workplace, office politics, dressing for success, childhood heros and heroines, childhood involvement in team sports, and advice they would share with beginning female managers. Written interview data collected by the students were then subjected to a content analysis, a technique that was chosen because of the nature of the data and the richness of the results that could be obtained from highly personal, descriptive responses.

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The demographic questions and certain interview questions revealed the characteristics of the women who served as the subjects of this study, allowing a profile to be drawn concerning the women in the sample. Most of these managerial women were in their thirties and forties, had college degrees, were married, and were the oldest children in their families. Most of their mothers and fathers had completed high school, and many of these parents had college degrees or some college coursework.

A majority of the women in the sample had served in managerial positions for five to ten years, and they described themselves as: intelligent, organized, hard-working, determined, caring, perfectionistic/meticulous, honest, loyal, positive, assertive, and people-oriented. Their childhood heroes and heroines were fathers, movie stars, teachers, mothers, and grandparents. Few of these women have heroic role models at this point in their lives. Childhood involvement with athletics and team sports was reported by less than half of these women; however, popular sports for those who did participate included baseball, softball, basketball, volleyball, and tennis.

When asked when they knew what they wanted to do with their lives, nearly 60% stated that they knew during college (22%) or later in their lives (37%). Seven subjects indicated that they knew before high school, while only four indicated that they had life plans during high school. Six women indicated that they didn't yet know what they wanted to do with their lives. One stated, "In fact, I am still searching." Others indicated that they have changed their plans frequently. Many responses revealed that changes in life plans were a part of their evolutionary development as individuals. Relevant comments to this question included, "Originally I went to work so we could afford a house--just had a job--not a career. After three or four years, I realized that with a little more training, I could be making more money and have a position instead of a job" and "My original goal was to have a responsible job but then

began to work toward a management career." It was clear from the majority of the responses that many women do not establish life goals, an important process even though these goals may change, until later in their lives.

In reflecting on the question concerning their original career goals and how these goals have changed over the years, these female managers overwhelmingly indicated that their career goals were different from the goals they had for themselves earlier in their lives. Only 16% indicated that they had retained the same career goals that they had in the past. Most indicated that they now had higher expectations for themselves in terms of their career futures--higher level positions in their own fields or starting their own businesses. When asked if they had a career plan in the past that had included their present positions, only 43% of these women indicated that they were now in positions that they had "planned" to occupy. Over half of the subjects stated that they "simply happened into their jobs". As one woman put it, "I just 'fell' into it." Another said, "Even though I didn't plan to get this job, I certainly have a plan for the next five years of my career." The responses generally revealed that many women have or had no clear career goals, were reactive rather than proactive in their life and career plans, and began career planning later in their lives.

When asked what changes they would make if they could turn the clock back on their educational experiences and career paths, the most common responses included attending college earlier, completing college (mentioned by women in business who had not completed their undergraduate degrees), pursuing degrees in business, economics, and finance, taking their education more seriously, and trying harder in high school and college. Over two-thirds of the women said they would make major or minor changes in their career paths, while the rest stated that they would make no changes.

Problems that many of these women shared concerning their inadequate or inappropriate career planning was stated succinctly by one manager who said, "I didn't realize I had a choice except becoming a nurse or a teacher. No one told me I could be anything I wanted. I needed more math background, and no one even knew enough about careers to give me the needed guidance. I might have taken an entirely different route with proper guidance--and become a lawyer or a CPA."

The effect of a woman's career on her marital status was the subject of one of the structured interview questions. In response to this question, the majority of these women (60%) said that their marriage or marital status had not been affected by their professional positions. Although 27% indicated that their marital status had been affected, a third of these indicated that the effect had been positive--and had enhanced their marriages. Four members of the sample stated that they had never married, and one of these indicated that at her present career level, "it is very difficult to meet single men." Several women indicated that a change in their marital status--divorce--was responsible for their seeking a job--then a career. Another stated that her career had greatly expanded her life and that "My career has affected my commitments--I now have more priorities, and they all are important." Some indicated that they didn't remarry after divorce because they were financially independent due to their positions. Overall, responses to this question reveal that many of these women have achieved a balance between their personal and professional lives and have stable, happy marriages.

When asked about their philosophies of leadership/management, the most frequently mentioned components of their philosophical frameworks included communication, motivation, goal-direction, fairness, teamwork, delegation, commitment, and participative decision-making. Responses suggested that

communication should be constant and open and that managers should share everything with employees. Listening as an integral part of effective two-way communication was stressed by many. One response indicated that, "Success in communications seems to be a prerequisite to success in a managerial position." Fairness and impartiality were said to be necessary to instill loyalty in the work force, while the need for general and specific goal-setting should be integrated into the communication process because effective managers not only need to state goals clearly but to communicate these goals clearly to the employees. The management role was seen as one that should be used to help members of the staff to develop to their full potential, making motivation a reality by helping people be more than they thought they could be.

Management by consensus and participative decision-making were also important components of the philosophies of these female executives. Feedback and input by the employees seemed to be very important to the leadership orientations of these women, and self-supervision was noted in many responses as the result of effective delegation, giving space to workers after they have been given specific expectations of the job they are to do. Interesting comments concerning the philosophy issue included, "Treat employees fairly and you will be treated fairly"; "Communicate everything--I want my people to know what I am doing and why"; "If something is wrong, don't try to place blame, just try to fix what is wrong"; "Persuade, don't dominate"; "Never expect more from your employees than you would do yourself; your subordinates need to see you working alongside them, supporting their efforts"; "Lead, don't push from behind"; and "Don't believe that nice guys finish last". Overall, responses in this category reflected that these women have an open, people-oriented philosophy of leadership that reflects the importance of shared commitments and loyalties.

In response to a question concerning the greatest influence on their leadership styles, family members were mentioned most frequently, with fathers noted most often as having the greatest effect on their styles. Mentors and bosses were the second most frequently named, while positive and negative role models were also influential, as were seminars and educational experiences. Some stated that they had learned the most about leadership by actually performing in a leadership role; they learned by doing.

Changing to their current position was given most often by the women in the sample as their best career decision; others felt that gaining new skills and knowledge through courses and degree programs in higher education helped them the most. Lack of assertiveness or risk-taking seemed to have led to their worst career decisions. Examples were staying too long at one level, waiting so long to go into management, quitting college, taking on dead-end jobs--often staff positions, not taking advantage of opportunities for promotion, not asking for more money when more responsibilities were given, and allowing their lives to become unbalanced in terms of their personal and professional needs. Perhaps lack of knowledge and political naivete contributed to these poor career decisions; responses seemed to indicated little understanding at earlier points in their careers about the real world of work--power, office politics, and strategies for getting ahead.

When asked why they got their positions over the other candidates that applied, the most common responses were having prior experiences and being well-rounded. The next most common response concerned having specific skills and talents necessary for the position, followed by the quality of their prior work--having a good track record of high level performance and knowing how to get things done. Other reasons mentioned included exhibiting confidence in interviews (knowing how to sell themselves), being innovative, having people

skills, having a mentor or supportive boss, and making their goals clear to the organization. Comments indicated that "preparedness and the willingness to give 110% is crucial" and that "it never hurts to be in the right place at the right time." A few members of the sample indicated that a position was literally created for them because of their visibility and talents.

Money was the primary factor that motivated these women into management positions, followed by wanting to be a change agent, needing a challenge, and having a vacancy occur above them at an opportune time. Other factors less frequently mentioned included seeing inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and ineptitude in the management levels above them, wanting to make decisions and implement them, wanting to work with people to get results, wanting responsibility, and wanting success and recognition. Only two members of the sample used the term "ambition" as a motivator, perhaps because of the negative connotation placed on the term when applied to a female manager.

When asked to describe the techniques that they use to motivate their employees, the most frequently stated response was to give recognition through the use of praise, positive strokes, and the acknowledgement of achievement. As one subject noted, "Give praise, lots of praise". Involving employees in the decisions that affect them by getting their input and giving promotions and chances for professional growth were also mentioned frequently. Considered almost as important by members of the sample were reinforcing the mission of the organization and the vision of what each is to do within it, showing kindness and concern for the employees, and providing expectations for workers through specific guidelines for production. Other techniques used by these women included being a positive role model, listening and practicing positive communication, giving time off work as a bonus or reward, promoting teamwork and unity, giving employees a feeling of personal self-worth, and showing confidence in their judgment by giving them new responsibilities.

The most common personnel problems these managerial women have with their employees concern a lack of commitment to their work as evidenced by procrastination, not working to potential, being off-task, being tardy or absent, and not taking their responsibilities seriously. These issues were followed closely by office politics, personality conflicts, and pettiness and jealousy in the workplace. Other problems mentioned frequently include incompetence, poor performance, and confrontations with employees on personnel matters. The methods used by these respondents to deal with these personnel problems typically involve dealing directly with the employee in a one-on-one conference, listening, and trying to get the employee to solve the problem himself/herself. Although the employee would be given the benefit of the doubt by these managers, dismissal was mentioned by 17% of them as the required remedy when attempts at remediation were not made or were ineffective. This attitude toward necessary termination was revealed in the responses of women in both business and education, even though the required due process in termination efforts in the public school sector makes the process very difficult.

When questioned about the related areas of assertiveness and risk-taking behaviors, 80% of the women interviewed stated that they considered themselves to be assertive; however, only half considered themselves to be consistent risk-takers. While the respondents stated that they learned assertiveness most often from experience and from observing role models, risk-taking behaviors still appeared to be more difficult for many of these women. Only 11 of the 45 women indicated that they had always been risk-takers; others indicated that they had evolved into being risk-takers but wished they had learned this skill earlier because they felt that it would have helped them to be more self-confident. Some indicated that they needed a strong support base before they could risk, while others found it difficult to take risks concerning money. Several of these women

noted that they learned to take risks only when they were forced to stick their necks out on issues, causes, and people they believed in. Comments concerning these issues included, "Taking risks at the right time promotes confidence"; "The more I go up in administration, the more I don't recognize the 'old scaredy cat' I used to be"; "Assertiveness is a necessity if you want to move ahead--or just survive"; "Passivity is not effective in a business organization"; and "I am assertive in my work life when necessary but not in my personal life." The reality of the workplace was revealed by the response of the woman manager who stated, "You have to be assertive or people walk all over you!" Perhaps learning assertive behavior earlier and being encouraged to take risks as children in both family and educational settings would help women to become stronger in these areas. Much work still needs to be done to help women overcome the liabilities they have from lack of training in these two dimensions.

In response to the question that asked if these women perceived any differences in the ways they managed male and female employees, two-thirds of the sample indicated that they did not manage men and women any differently on the basis of gender. Their responses revealed that they tried to treat each person as an individual and used the style appropriate to the situation. Those who said that they did use a different management style for male and female employees gave the following reasons: "There is a definite difference--it has to be the man's idea for it to work; women accept things more at face value"; "Women will question me more about the work to be completed"; "It's probably subconscious--I personally have a lighter hand with a female. There is a lot more resentment if I am managing a male"; "I have a better rapport with men--there is a difference in their response to me but I don't know why"; "It's harder to manage men because I am in a male-dominated field, and I have to prove myself over and over again. I have to do <u>everything</u> better than my male counterparts"; "Women are sometimes moodier than men and harder to deal with"; "I'm

a little more personal with women, mainly concerning female problems"; and "I can be more open and direct with men, while I must be more cautious with women who seem to need more explanation and justification. You waste time just winning them over!" It is clear after reviewing these responses that although some women managers state that they used different management styles based on the gender of the employees, whether or not the problems they perceive are caused by differences in gender is unclear from the mixed responses to this question.

A related question concerned whether these managerial women considered women to be more effective leaders than men. Their responses indicated that two-thirds of those interviewed felt that the gender of the leader had no real effect on the effectiveness of the leadership exhibited. One woman summed up the feelings of many others when she stated, "Gender has nothing to do with it; human skills and empathy have a greater bearing on effectiveness." Another put an interesting twist on the issue in her response: "A good woman is more effective than a good man, but a bad woman manager will hurt you more than a bad man." Other respondents agreed that women were more effective leaders (34%) and said that women were more sensitive, consistent, committed, organized, perceptive, detail-oriented, caring, concerned with relationships, precise, dependable, willing to work harder, visionary, task-oriented, and less ego-centered. One interesting comment to this questions was, "Women tend to be more psychologically insightful leaders than men because cultural passivity has made the study of psychology of others a survival technique." It is interesting to note that none of the women managers indicated that they felt that men were more effective leaders than women, while the reverse was often perceived to be the case.

Another gender-related question concerned sexual harrassment and any incidences of it in the work histories of the respondents. Although 62% indicated that they were never subjected to this type of harrassment, 38% stated that they had been sexually harassed in the workplace. Perhaps a clearer definition should have

been given concerning what actually constitutes sexual harrassment in light of some of the responses given. One such response indicates perhaps the lack of awareness of others concerning the scope of the issue in her statement, "I would seriously doubt that there is any woman in any position of authority who has not been the target of sexual harrassment even though it is not always overt or even at first glance obvious enough to cause waves." Another indicated that she had experienced it in almost every job she had ever had. Others felt that they had not been harassed because they chose "not to perceive it that way", they were "business-like", they "didn't give out those signals ", or they "saw it as flirting." When asked how they handled harrassment when it did occur, answers included, "I simply ignored it"; "I acted like I didn't hear, wasn't aware, or wasn't interested. It soon stopped"; "I told him to keep his damn hands off me and never to touch me again"; "I usually laughed it off"; "First take time to assess the situation, then confront the individual one-on-one directly. Then go to a supervisor and report it, get feedback if it continues." The importance of addressing the problem directly and not simply ignoring it noted in the last response was further emphasized in this account: "I did ignore it, but now I try to find a way to let them know how it offends me. It may be subtle but not always. If you don't say anything, these men seem to think that it's acceptable to you." Some of the responses indicate that sexual harassment is still a problem for many women in the workplace and that strategies for dealing with this issue should be addressed in training programs for both men and women in public and private sector organizations.

When asked how difficult it was for them to work with other women, a two-thirds majority of these managers stated that they had no difficulty in working with other women. About one-third stated that they felt it was easy or not too difficult. Only three members of the sample stated that they had any difficulty working with members of their gender. When asked in following questions, however, about any negative

experiences that came to mind concerning female co-workers or subordinates or reasons why some women are perceived to be non-supportive of female managers, many of these respondents indicated difficulties that were not apparent in their responses to the first question.

Negative experiences involving other women in the workplace included the following comments: "I understand the games of women better than male managers and this causes problems"; "I am sometimes embarassed by the actions of women toward their male counterparts who fall over themselves to raise their positions in the company or raise their self-esteem--and lose esteem in men's eyes with their actions"; "I have to remind them that beauty shop appointments and clothing sales don't warrant time from work"; "Some women seem to take my self-confidence as a 'know-it-all' attitude"; "I had a female secretary who reported to a male counterpart and to me; she was much more cooperative with him than with me"; "I've had some problems with a few queen bees"; "It's hard not to develop a personal relationship with women at work"; "Women are more emotional than men--they haven't been on a team like many men and are afraid of competition"; "I dislike women who are manipulative and use their feminine wiles to get what they want; I call their hand on this". Only eight women in the study were unable to recall a single negative experience with other women in the workplace; however, their overall responses to the previous question indicate that relationships between women at work must be much more positive that negative.

In response to the question concerning reasons that some women are non-supportive of women managers, the most frequently mentioned cause was jealousy. Other reasons included conditioning, envy, insecurity, and competition. Comments to this question included: "Other women see you as a threat; they feel that they should have been in your position"; "Females are over-achievers--they consider you competition to be defeated"; "I feel that some women are insecure and not very

comfortable with their own sexual identity"; "Because they are used to working with men and manipulating and circumventing; when you work for a woman, you can't do this--at least not with me"; "Some women are envious because they do not have a happy position in their own lives. They have not moved beyond seeing people as male-female--rather than as individual persons"; "Some women expect a lot of personal consideration from other women that they wouldn't expect from men and become non-supportive if they do not receive it"; and "Women tend to fall back to the junior high school level of petty and jealous attitudes that they cannot overcome". It appears from the responses to this question that some women are viewed by these female managers as non-supportive and can give specific reasons why they think that this problem exists.

In giving advice concerning "dressing for success" the responses most frequently included: dressing conservatively, not dressing like a man, not wearing clothes that are too lacy or frilly, wearing either a suit or a dress with a jacket, buying clothes that fit well and are well made, having your "colors" done, and looking the part of the role you occupy (or aspire to). Comments indicated that clothes need to be spotlessly clean, neat, and comfortable--especially shoes. The look should be tasteful and should convey a professional image but never be sexy or flashy. Although a few of the subjects indicated that dress was not a big issue with them, the majority of the women interviewed agreed with this comment, "You only get one chance for a first impression--therefore, it is so important." Others said, "It does matter how you look. Clothes and image are important and should enhance, not detract from, the knowledge and authority one wishes to project--clothes, make-up, and hairstyle all come into play." Others didn't like the conservative look espoused by the majority; they felt that women should develop their own styles that reflected their own personalities. As one said, "suits get

boring." Another related this story in explaining why she disagreed with the dressing for success formula: "I read in a 'Dress for Success' book that open-toed shoes, which I had worn for years, were a 'no-no' because they were too sexy. When I saw the author of this book somewhat later at a meeting, his clothes were literelly covered with dandruff! This completely turned me off of his notion of successful dressing."

Regardless of their attitudes toward dressing for success as individuals, the overall consensus was that the total image of a person is extremely important in the workplace, that the way you dress reflects the way you feel about yourself, that how you look commands attention and adds to your self-confidence, and that appearance is an important variable to advancement. One woman reinforced this last idea in her comment, "I can't get into 'dressing for success'. Maybe that's why I'm not as successful as I want to be. There is something to it, but it makes me mad." Several other responses in this vein do indicate that something about the "dressing" issue strikes a dischordant note in some women; however, the real world dictates to the pragmatic that it is an issue that is not to be ignored or discounted.

When asked about advice they would give to aspiring female managers concerning office politics, 65% of the respondents indicated that it was best not to get involved at all in the politics of the workplace. Common concerns noted by these women were, "Avoid it at all costs"; "Stay completely out of it"; "Don't be drawn into the quarrels of others"; "Never side with anyone"; and "Don't gossip--stay in the middle." Another said, "Keep a tight lip. Women must be careful because they tend to share too much about themselves and others at work."

A different perspective on the issue of office politics, however, was given by over a third of the women (35%) who saw the politics at work as an indication

of the power positions in the organization, the "grapevine", and the informal group structures, as well as the people who link these groups together. These women stated that involvement in office politics as they perceived them was necessary and positive if done wisely. Comments from these women included: "To be successful, one must understand and use the politics of the situation"; "Learn the politics of the good ol' boys, then try to figure out how you will deal with them"; "You need to interact with the people in higher level positions, to get to know them and let them know how you perform"; "Set your own rules. People respect you more if you don't involve yourself in politics too much, but you have to play the game if you wish to survive and get ahead"; and "Be political and understand political strategies--know who has the power". One subject summarized these comments succinctly:

> Office politics do determine who gets moved. People playing the games are the ones who get exposure to higher management. Playing politics is a good way to keep a finger on the pulse of the company and to be ready to move with it.

In summary, it appears that the two distinct types of respones to this question involve quite different definitions of office politics; however, advice from both perspectives is beneficial to the novice administrator as well as the notion that politics is necessary and not evil--but that gossip and games in the workplace can be.

The last area of advice concerned tips these managers would give to beginners to help them advance successfully in the ranks of an organization. Two tips were mentioned most often in the responses: getting the best education and training possible and being visible (particularly to people in upper-level management). Other frequently given advice included, "Stay current. Be on the cutting edge by reading everything you can, and not just in your own field"; "Be a team player"; "Set your own goals, knowing the goals of the company. You

must be able to see the big picture of the organization"; "You must work hard and be productive"; "You must learn to take risks"; "Effective communication skills are so important"; "Make your boss look good"; "Use your expertise and judgment to solve problems that beset top management and you'll advance"; "Be willing to learn from other jobs and fill in where needed"; "Honk your own horn and make your goals and interests known"; "Latch on to a person who is rising"; "Find someone you can ask for help that won't spread it around that you need help"; "Don't be afraid to make mistakes but be sure to learn from your mistakes"; and "One enemy is too many. Be careful". One woman wove her thoughts into a fabric of advice that sums up the ideas and comments of many others:

> In order to successfully advance in the ranks of an organization, a woman must be even more willing than a man to be: well educated for the position; willing to take risks; willing to forgive and forget slights, oversights, and ill thought-out comments; to be able to ignore deliberate comments on women in a man's world; to be cheerful and helpful; to give others a second chance (always) and yet to hold her ground on matters of conscience and not to compromise her ideals. She must be enthusiastic and truly enjoy the work she does to make it all possible.

The overall results of this study can be summarized as follows:

1. The profile of the managerial women in this study reveals that they have been in management positions for 5 to 10 years, have college degrees, are married, and are the eldest children in their families.
2. Many of these women did not establish life goals until later in their lives, and they now wish they had done more realistic career planning, had higher expectations for themselves earlier in their lives, and been more proactive in their career and life planning.
3. Changes these women would make in their careers include attending college earlier, taking business and finance courses, and taking their education more seriously.

4. The philosophies of leadership of these women indicate that they promote teamwork and commitment through motivation techniques, goal-direction, fairness, delegation, and participative decision-making.
5. The fathers of these women and their mentors have had the greatest influence on their leadership styles.
6. The primary motivators that caused these women to move into management positions were obtaining higher salaries, wanting to serve as a change agent, and needing a challenge.
7. The most common motivational techniques these women utilize with their employees are recognition through the use of praise, management by consensus, and advancement.
8. While most of these managers considered themselves to be assertive, less than half considered themselves to be consistent risk-takers.
9. There were no differences in managing men and women or in the effectiveness of the leadership of men or women, according to the majority of these mid-managers.
10. Advancement in the managerial ranks was seen by these women as the result of a broad experiential base, being well educated, being visible, keeping current, being a team player, and setting goals.